Love brought this Greek bride to Camas

By JIM GERSBACH

Cresoula Morris left her family, friends and native land to come to Camas for love.

Almost six decades after she arrived as the 19-year-old bride of Greek immigrant Demetrious Morris, Cresoula remembers clearly the glance which turned her heart and changed her life.

It happened in Vollos, the city near Athens where Cresoula grew up. She was the second of eight children of a tobacco factory worker who later started a successful bicycle shop.

One day in 1925 she was at home when her father's brother-in-law dropped by with a bachelor friend who'd returned from the United States to find a wife.

Demetrious Morris was 44. He had left his native village of Kalouskopi when still in his 20s and gone to America to find his fortune.

He and his brother Nick, settled in Camas where they rented a farm on Prune Hill and sold milk.

By dint of hard work and frugal living Demetrious after many years saved enough to buy a farm north of Lackamas Lake.

Then he returned to his village to find a wife. But the unmarried village women as old as he were aged by hard work and he didn't meet one he found attractive.

As things turned out, his future bride found him.

When Cresoula saw Demetrious walk into the courtyard of her family's home in Vollos she was instantly in love.

"I said to myself 'I'm going to marry him,'" she recounted, speaking in a strong Greek accent.

When she let her wish to marry be known, Demetrious told her to think about the age difference before she made up her mind.

And Cresoula's father was against his daughter's marrying a man so much older.

But love prevailed and within a week Cresoula and Demetrious were engaged. On Jan. 25, 1925 they were married in Vollos.

They stayed three months before sailing for the New World. Said Cresoula of her leaving behind her old world, "If you get married you have to go wherever your husband go."

She set foot in Camas on July 4 after a 22-day trans-Atlantic voyage and a train trip across the continent.

Camas in the 1920s was a quiet community, said Cresoula. Electricity didn't come to the Mor[illegible] farm until 1926. Horses plodded along the muddy road in front of their property.

The city did have a sizable Greek community, mostly bachelors lured by the riches everyone thought could be made in America.

"They thought America you find money in the road. But you work hard," said Cresoula.

Most of the Greeks worked in the mill, returning to Greece when they had saved enough to marry and buy land or set themselves up in business.

But the Morris family stayed. And grew.

The same year she came to America Cresoula produced a son, Ted. Three daughters were born before the 1920s were out.

In her first years in Camas Cresoula had to rely on her husband to translate for her when neighbors came by. "But I say to myself 'I have to start learning.'"

So when Ted started school Cresoula would sit down at night with his school books and teach herself English, first having to master the Latin alphabet.

She soon surprised even her husband by talking to her neighbors—in English.

"If you put your mind to something you have to do it," she said.

With that same determination Cresoula on the eve of World War II learned the Constitution in order to become naturalized.

"I have to study hard," she said. But to her own amazement she passed the naturalization test without any problem and was handed her citizenship papers.

Seventeen years ago she and Demetrious returned to Greece for their first visit in 40 years. But, said Cresoula, "I didn't want to stay."

She and Demetrious had 45 years together before he died, at 89. She still lives in the neatly kept home he built, raising a garden and cooking Greek dishes like revani, lamb and heavily spiced beans.

She is proud of her and Demetrious' 10 grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren, and of the fact that all were baptized in the Greek Orthodox Church in Portland and married by an Orthodox priest.

Of the life she chose in America she said "I don't complain anything."

AT HOME—Since she first arrived in Camas from Vollos, Greece in 1925, Cresoula Morris has lived along SR 500 north of Lackamas Lake. Here she stands in her garden admiring a sunflower. Many people ask her if her husband, who brought her to this country, changed his last name to Morris when he immigrated to the United States. Buty Cresoula said Morris is an old Greek name which only coincidentally sounds like an English one. POST Photo by Jim Gersbach.